

Messi keeps scoring

AFP, Madrid
 Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi scored in a ninth successive La Liga game as Barcelona won 3-1 at Malaga on Sunday to remain 11 points clear of Atletico Madrid and 18 in front of champions Real Madrid.

open the scoring on seven minutes. He was alert again to block at the feet of Pedro Rodriguez but he could do nothing when Messi intercepted a poor back pass from Ignacio Camacho on 27 minutes and cut back to avoid the advancing keeper, before sliding the ball home for the opener.

The home side, who started the day in fourth spot, were struggling to create chances and it wasn't until a Roque Santa Cruz glancing header on 37 minutes that Victor Valdes was first called into action in the Barca goal.

Fabregas doubled the lead five minutes into the second period when Messi found the former Arsenal captain with a perfectly weighted chip on the left hand side of the area.

He still had a lot to do but with a simple left foot control and right footed shot he slid the ball past Caballero.

Substitute Thiago wrapped things up with a left-footed drive after exchanging passes with the Argentinian with eight minutes to play before Buonanotte's consolation.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (L) scores the opening goal past Malaga goalkeeper Willy Caballero during their Primera Liga encounter at the Rosaleda Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

RESULTS

Real Betis 2 (Campbell 7, Ruben Castro 63) Levante 0
 Real Sociedad 1 (Vela 45) Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Pizzi 27)
 Atletico Madrid 2 (Tiago 31, Falcao 38-pen) Real Zaragoza 0
 Malaga 1 (Buonanotte 89) **Barcelona**

Messi got the opener before supplying Cesc Fabregas and Thiago Alcantara for the second and third goals.

Messi's Argentine compatriot Diego Buonanotte scored from a free-kick in the final minutes for Malaga.

The goal was Messi's 28th in the league this season from just 19 games and at the halfway stage Barcelona have only dropped two points -- in a draw against Real.

Willy Caballero in the Malaga goal was determined to show why his side have the best defensive record in La Liga this season and he somehow robbed the ball from Messi's foot when it seemed the Argentinian would dance round him to

City trump Arsenal

AFP, London
 Manchester City kept the title race alive as the champions won 2-0 at 10-man Arsenal to secure their first away league success over the Gunners for nearly 38 years.

Roberto Mancini's side knew anything less than a victory at the Emirates Stadium would all but end their title hopes after leaders Manchester United moved 10 points clear with a 2-1 win over Liverpool earlier on Sunday.

But second-placed City showed their determination to hold on to the crown with a first league win on Arsenal turf since October 1975.

The turning point came early on when Arsenal defender Laurent Koscielny was sent off by referee Mike Dean for a professional foul on Edin Dzeko.

Although Dzeko missed the penalty which resulted from that incident, City exploited their numerical superiority in ruthless fashion with goals from James Milner and Dzeko before half-time.

City had captain Vincent Kompany sent off in the closing stages, but it was too late to spark an Arsenal fightback and Mancini's men, who have won five of their last six league games, will believe they can still overturn United's seven-point lead.

In contrast, Arsenal's spluttering attempts to qualify for the Champions League look more unconvincing by the week and Arsene Wenger's side remain six points behind fourth-placed Tottenham.

City returned a large portion of their 3,000 ticket allocation after fans refused to pay £62 (83 dollars) for seats in the away end, but those who boycotted the fixture missed an historic day for their club.

Police had been called to deal with a suspect package in a car park close to the Emirates before kick-off, but it was Arsenal's hapless defending that gave more cause for alarm.

City benefited from those frailties in the 10th minute when Koscielny rashly grabbed hold of Dzeko and hauled the Bosnian forward to the

turf as the pair contested a high ball in the Arsenal area.

Dean immediately awarded a penalty and sent off Koscielny for his rugby tackle.

It looked like advantage City but Wojciech Szczesny came to Arsenal's rescue as he deflected Dzeko's spot-kick onto a post with his legs and then clasped the ball to his body as it rebounded along the goal-line and into his arms.

Dzeko, attempting to make amends for his penalty miss, screwed a shot wildly off target from a tight angle with two City team-mates screaming for a pass.

But City didn't need to rue Dzeko's profligacy for long as Arsenal were caught cold by a quick free-kick from Gareth Barry in the 21st minute.

David Silva took Barry's short pass and moved possession onto Carlos Tevez and, with Arsenal's defenders responding far too sluggishly, the Argentine had time and space to find Milner 10 yards from goal and the England midfielder lashed a superb strike into the far corner of Szczesny's goal.

Kompany red card to be appealed

AFP, London
 Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini revealed his club will appeal against Vincent Kompany's red card in Sunday's 2-0 win against Arsenal.

City captain Kompany faces a three-match ban after being dismissed by referee Mike Dean for a foul on Arsenal midfielder Jack Wilshere in the 75th minute at the Emirates Stadium.

But Mancini is adamant the Belgian defender was harshly treated as television replays showed he won the ball with his tackle and he plans to appeal the decision to the Football Association.

"Yes we will appeal, absolutely," Mancini said. "It is not a red card, it is no foul. I don't know how this is possible."

Lazio close gap

AFP, Milan
 A 2-0 home win over Atalanta boosted Lazio's Serie A title ambitions after champions and leaders Juventus were held to a 1-1 draw away to Parma on Sunday.

Lazio began the second half of the season trailing Juve by five points but sealed their 13th win of the campaign thanks to goals from Sergio Floccari and a Davide Brivio own goal.

With Juve settling for a share of the spoils after Nicola Sansone levelled Jonathan Biabiany's earlier own goal, it left Vladimir Petkovic's side just three points adrift in second with a two-point lead on Napoli.

Inter Milan had leapfrogged Napoli into third thanks to a 2-0 home win over Pescara on Saturday, however Napoli re-established order with a convincing 3-0 home win over Palermo.

Inter now sit fourth, seven points behind Juventus but three clear of Fiorentina after La Viola suffered a shock 3-1 defeat at the hands of Udinese.

A week on from their 3-0 home rout over Inter, Antonio Di Natale scored his second consecutive league brace as Udinese claimed only their seventh win of the campaign to move one place up to eighth.

AC Milan sit in seventh place but could leapfrog Roma, who were stunned 1-0 in Catania after Alejandro Gomez's 61st-minute effort, into sixth place if they manage to account for Sampdoria in Sunday's late game.

Elsewhere, Cagliari moved out of the bottom three at the expense of Genoa after beating sealing a 2-1 over the visitors thanks to Daniele Conti's 82nd minute winner.

Only days ago Petkovic had claimed Juve already have one hand on the title, but the Biancocelesti are now the champions' closest challengers.

Lazio took the lead in the 67th minute, albeit in controversial fashion.

Romanian Stefan Radu's cross from the left was first-timed onto the crossbar by Atalanta defender Davide Brivio, but before Floccari picked up the rebound and slammed it home the ball made contact with his hand.

The goal stood, and Lazio went on to double their lead 10 minutes later when Brivio headed superbly into his own net after attempting to deflect a long-range cross out of play.

Fiorentina took the lead at the Stadio Friuli when Gonzalo Rodriguez rose above the defence to smash a header off the crossbar and into the net via the head of keeper Zeljko Brkic.

Udinese won a penalty when Maurizio Domizzi was fouled in the box and Di Natale stepped up to send Norberto Neto the wrong way for his 13th league goal of the season.

There was a hint of offside as Di Natale broke through the Viola defence to beat Neto for a 14th league goal which put him second behind Napoli's Edinson Cavani's Serie A-leading tally of 16.

But the hosts confirmed their superiority barely a minute later when Colombian striker Luis Muriel beat Neto with a right-foot strike.

C'Ron wants to stay at Real

AFP, Madrid
 Cristiano Ronaldo says he wants to stay with Real Madrid until the end of his contract with the club.

The 27-year-old Portuguese striker's contract with Real runs out in June 2015 but Spanish media have reported that he is unhappy at the club and may leave at the end of the season.

"I want to see out my contract at Real Madrid: I'm very clear about that. After that, well, I don't know what will happen in the future," he said in an interview published on Fifa.com.

Ronaldo, who joined Real Madrid from Manchester United in 2009, said he still believes it is possible for the club to win La Liga despite falling 18 points behind leaders and archrivals Barcelona.

"We haven't started the championship very well for sure. We know that La Liga's an uphill struggle for us now, but nothing is impossible in football," he said.

"We're going to work hard, win games and see what happens. And of course, there's the Champions League and the Copa del Rey too."



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Remy to join Newcastle

REUTERS, Paris
 Olympique Marseille have struck a deal with Newcastle United over the transfer of France striker Loic Remy, the Ligue 1 club's president Vincent Labrune said on Sunday.

"We found an agreement with Newcastle. We gave Loic permission to negotiate with them," Labrune told French radio RMC.

According to media reports, the English Premier League club will pay a 10.5-million-euro (\$14.01-million) fee for the 26-year-old Remy, who has 17 caps and has scored four goals for France.

Remy, who was in Marseille's squad for their Ligue 1 game at strugglers Sochaux on Sunday, had left his team mates to discuss terms with the Premier League side, a source close to the club said.



Lazio forward Sergio Floccari (C) celebrates his goal with teammates during their Serie A clash against Atalanta at Rome's Olympic Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Tackling under threat

REUTERS, London
 The art of tackling could become extinct if full-blooded but fair challenges like the one Manchester City's Vincent Kompany executed at Arsenal on Sunday continue to be punished with red cards, former defenders fear.

City captain Kompany appeared to time his tackle on Arsenal's surging midfielder Jack Wilshere to perfection, taking the ball cleanly with his out-stretched left leg.

While Wilshere was sent flying by the inevitable coming together of two fully-committed players, even he looked shocked to see referee Mike Dean produce a straight red card for the Belgian - who also received his marching orders for a similar tackle on Manchester United's Nani last season.

Former tough-tackling Chelsea defender Ron Harris, known affectionately in his heyday as Chopper, said Kompany's tackle was meat and drink to defenders in the 1970s and 80s.

"When I was playing, if I had made a tackle like the one Kompany did on

Wilshere I would have been proud of myself," Harris told Reuters on Monday. "I would have given myself 10 out of 10 for that one. What was he supposed to do? They say you can't show your studs but when you slide in like that you have to show your studs. That doesn't mean it was a leg-breaker."

"I feel a bit for referees because they are under scrutiny but as a member of the defenders' union I have to say that was a perfect tackle. But then the modern-day prima donna strikers would probably say it should have been a red card."

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